

90th Anniversary of the ILO
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As the ILO turns 90 in 2009, its International Training Centre based in Turin, is approaching 45, half the age of its parent organization. This is somewhat symbolic, as the creation of the Centre in response to the Declaration of Philadelphia marked a new period in the history of the ILO.

In the twenty years that followed the end of World War II some fifty more States joined the ILO, mostly developing economies issued from the process of decolonization. The new membership brought an expansion of the ILO's mission and operations from its core standard-setting function to include technical cooperation and capacity building.

While subscribing to the ILO's values and principles, the new member States expected the ILO's support to help them develop legislation, policies, programmes and institutions enabling them to attain levels of economic and social development that would underpin the concrete application of these values and principles.

It is in the context of the ILO's new capacity-building effort that the International Training Centre was created. The Government of Italy and the City of Turin generously offered to the ILO the premises that had been built along the Po River for the celebration of the first centennial of Italian unity in 1961. In October 1965 a first group of 40 trainees from Asia, Africa and Latin America arrived on campus. Today, it is about 12,000 participants who are trained by the Turin Centre each year. Over 160,000 people from 190 different countries have passed through the Centre's training and learning programmes.

The Centre was originally set up as a vocational training operation but it gradually evolved into what it is today: a senior training and learning facility for policy-makers, managers, practitioners and trainers from ILO constituent and partner organizations, committed to building their own capacity for the cause of social justice through economic and social development. Once an Italian Minister, discovering the Centre called it the “School of Democracy”.

Over time, the ILO has progressively withdrawn from direct implementation and emphasized the transfer of know-how and the strengthening of national institutions’ capacity to take over the responsibility for developing policies and programmes.

The Turin Centre’s comparative advantage within the ILO is precisely its capacity to translate policies, values and information into learning strategies and tools enhancing the effectiveness and impact of knowledge and competency development and sharing.

Based on over four decades of experience, the Centre has been gradually developing a learning strategy branded as the Turin Learning Approach which is based on three main pillars: relevance, differentiation and impact.

Relevance

The more that training and learning activities are embedded in wider national policies, the more likely it is that learning will translate into organizational performance. It demands on the part of the Centre a systematic effort to identify and demonstrate the relevance of proposed actions to the ultimate goals shared between the ILO and its national constituents. This effort is usually undertaken through the ILO’s network of field offices.

Differentiation

Differentiation is an essential ingredient in the overall effort to move from a concept of “training”, where content and methods are focused on what the trainer knows and wishes to transfer, to the notion of “learning”, centred on the learner’s needs, demands and conditions. This is a challenging dimension for the Turin Centre and its big added-value, working with a global audience of national institutions from 190 different countries with very diverse political, socio-economic, cultural and linguistic features - it should be noted here that the Centre conducts its activities in eight languages.

The added value of international courses in a complex and global world where new knowledge and practices are constantly created and re-invented is to facilitate cross-fertilization and peer learning among as many national institutions and experiences as possible in a conducive learning environment. The Turin Learning Approach (TLA) restricts the top-down presentation to indispensable technical knowledge to the benefit of the involvement of participants through participatory methods and practical applications, in acquiring the knowledge, skills and attitudes they need to increase their individual and organizational competencies.

At the same time, about half of the Centre’s training activities are implemented in-country. This allows the Centre to better customize the design and delivery of training to specific institutional demands and situations.

Impact

In recent years the Centre has significantly enhanced its efforts to evaluate its programmes. Individual training activities are systematically evaluated by participants and their feedback is ploughed back into the design and delivery of future activities.

Associated with these three pillars, the Turin Learning Approach taking advantage of new technology is developing a

comprehensive Learning Tools based on three pedagogical phases.

The three pedagogical phases

Commercial e-learning has been booming over the past few years worldwide. However, the development of specific applications and facilitation techniques for audiences working in poor institutions in developing countries, where connectivity is scarce and expensive, has been developed. This is what has been one of the most important contributions made by the Centre to the overall international development agenda.

Distance education and e-learning, in particular, are increasingly adopted by the Centre as a way of complementing face-to-face training – by better preparing participants beforehand and following up with them afterwards.

In this context, increasingly the Centre's activities are blended and implemented in three consecutive phases. The first is the online phase during which participants familiarize themselves with the content of the activity. This significantly reinforces the effectiveness of the second phase: the face-to-face workshop. The face-to-face phase is still particularly necessary and increasingly relevant taking into account the importance given by the TLA to the knowledge sharing process. Finally, the third phase, is an online phase after the workshop which allows for continuous sharing of resources and communication with and among participants.

Conclusion

The Centre provides a unique level playing field for institutions from the most diverse countries and societies to understand how labour, social and development issues have been addressed, to share good practices and to learn from one another's lessons. It offers a platform for the promotion and dissemination of ILO values, policies and tools encompassed in the Decent Work Agenda and in the Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair

Globalisation adopted by the 2008 International Labour Conference, but also to validate and obtain feedback on the basis of the broadest range of national experiences and practices.

This dimension represents the Turin Centre's greatest added value and uniqueness; no other UN organization is endowed with a similar capacity-building tool. The proper use of the Centre may significantly increase the relevance and the impact of ILO technical cooperation.